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SUBJECT: STATUS OF BIOTECHNOLOGY REGULATIONS IN SRI LANKA

REF: SECSTATE 263456

1. Summary: Sri Lanka does not have formal biotechnology regulations on the production and import of agricultural biotech products into the country. An attempt to ban the import of GMO foods in 2001 was abandoned due to intense lobbying from foreign missions (including the U.S) and trade partners. Currently, NGOs opposed to GMOs are promulgating labeling for importation of GMO products. There is much confusion regarding the benefits and risks of biotech products in Sri Lanka, as information available in the local media does not accurately reflect an unbiased view of biotechnology. End Summary

2. Sri Lanka signed the Biosafety Protocol on 24 May 2000, and plans to ratify the agreement as early as possible. The Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources is the focal point for biosafety and has an obligation to implement the articles of the protocol. The Ministry has initiated a project to establish a National Biosafety Framework (NBF) to ensure safety in import of GMOs into the country. The Framework must be completed before ratification of the Protocol. One of Sri Lanka's most prominent agricultural scientists, Professor Athula Perera, has been appointed the National Project Coordinator and is entrusted with the task of producing a comprehensive NBF document. Professor Perera was responsible for setting up the first biotech laboratory in the country and has implemented trials for some crops.

3. The project is expected to take approximately 18 months to complete. The planned outcomes from the establishment of the NBF include:

- inventories of current use of biotechnology,
- existing legal instruments related to biotech/biosafety,
- active or planned national projects for capacity building related to the safe use of biotechnology,
- database of relevant experts,
- access to relevant information for all stakeholders,
- mechanisms for adequate involvement of all stakeholders on biosafety-related issues,
- drafts of legal instruments,
- systems of risk management and audit,
- administrative system for compliance with the Cartagena Protocol,
- mechanisms for public consultations on the decision making process regarding GMOs,
- mechanism for sharing scientific knowledge at subregional level,
- publication of inventories,
- reports of national meetings and the final national biosafety framework.

4. The Council for Agriculture Research Policy (CARP), a government-funded research organization, and the National Science Foundation are actively involved in researching priority areas to incorporate biotech into the domestic agriculture and livestock sectors. Rice, rubber and ornamental fish have already been identified in this respect. Professor Perera also commented that the establishment of the NBF will assist the country in harnessing all aspects of modern biotechnology under a central focal point in a safe and responsible manner. The NBF, according to Dr. Perera, will not be a barrier, but a mechanism to incorporate modern technology into domestic agriculture.

5. Contact information for the NBF Project follows:
The National Project Coordinator
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